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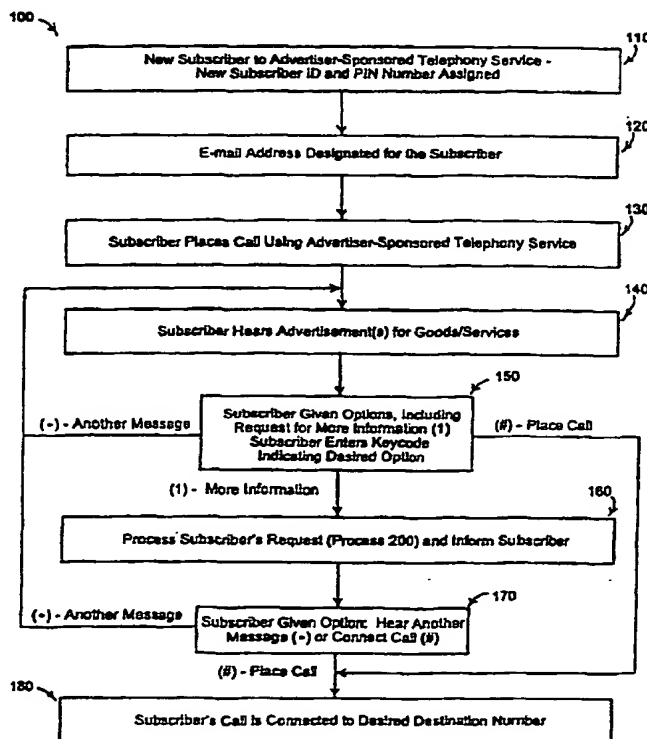
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(71) Applicant (for all designated States except US): BROAD-POINT COMMUNICATIONS, INC. [US/US]; Suite 150, 8400 Corporate Drive, Landover, MD 20785 (US).			
(72) Inventor; and (75) Inventor/Applicant (for US only): KAMEL, P., Alexandre [US/US]; 603 Puritan Court, Annapolis, MD 21401 (US).		Published With international search report.	
(74) Agent: VOLENTINE, C., Adam; Jones Volentine, L.L.P., Suite 150, 12200 Sunrise Valley Drive, Reston, VA 20191 (US).			

(54) Title: METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR AUTOMATIC FULFILLMENT IN AN ADVERTISER-SPONSORED TELEPHONY SYSTEM

(57) Abstract

An advertiser-sponsored telephony system includes an auto-fulfillment option, wherein when a user requests additional information regarding an advertised product (160), the system automatically sends an e-mail message to a designated e-mail address for the user. The e-mail message preferably includes a hyperlink to an Internet site where the user may receive further information regarding and/or order the product. When the user activates the hyperlink, a notification is sent to the advertiser-sponsored telephony system (295) so that it may more effectively track the advertisement response rate and/or a subscriber's behavior pattern.



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TITLE OF THE INVENTION

METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR AUTOMATIC FULFILLMENT IN
AN ADVERTISER-SPONSORED TELEPHONY SYSTEM

TECHNICAL FIELD

5 This invention pertains to the field of advertiser-sponsored telephony systems, and more particularly to a system and method of fulfilling a subscriber's request for additional information about, or to make a purchase of, a product advertised via an advertiser-sponsored telephony system.

10 BACKGROUND ART

Magazines, television and other mass media vehicles operate by offering something of value (e.g., subsidized entertainment or information) in exchange for a person's time and attention.

It is well known that such mass marketing advertising
15 results in fundamental inefficiencies and other drawbacks as a method of allowing a person to broker their time and attention to an advertising or promotional message in exchange for something of value. Mass media advertisements routinely capture (and pay for) the time of people who are not potential
20 purchasers of the advertiser's goods or services. Accordingly, systems of more targeted advertisement delivery and attention brokerage have been developed which (1) allow an advertiser to more accurately pay for the time and attention of only likely potential customers; and (2) allow people to more easily and
25 effectively broker their time and attention for something of value.

For example, telephony systems have been proposed which allow subscribers to place telephone calls for free or at reduced rates in exchange for exposing the subscriber to
30 advertiser-sponsored promotional messages. Aspects of such

systems are described, for example, in U.S. Patent Application Serial Nos. 09/015,063 and 09/192,306.

Advertisers are ultimately interested, however, in motivating actual sales of their goods and services
5 (collectively referred to hereafter as "products").
Consequently, it is desirable not only to target advertisements (and advertisement expenditures) on likely potential customers, but it is also desirable to more effectively provide the potential customers with an easy and convenient way to request
10 more information about, or to purchase, products for which they just heard an advertisement, and a way to automatically fulfill those requests.

Also, advertisers desire feedback on how successful their various advertising expenditures are in reaching potential
15 customers and motivating actual sales. This feedback is useful for suggesting where future advertisement resources should be deployed to achieve the best results. Therefore it is desirable to provide a method which allows an advertiser to identify customer inquiries and purchases made in response to
20 advertisements made via an advertiser-sponsored telephony system, and preferably, to track inquiries and sales to a particular advertisement message.

Accordingly, it would be advantageous to provide an improved method of fulfilling a potential customer's request for
25 additional information about, or to make a purchase of, an advertised product in an advertiser-sponsored telephony system.

It would also be advantageous to provide an auto-fulfillment method in an advertiser-sponsored telephony system which facilitates tracking of subscriber purchases of advertised
30 products.

Other and further objects and advantages will appear hereinafter.

DISCLOSURE OF INVENTION

The present invention comprises a method of auto-fulfillment of customer requests for goods and services advertised via an advertiser-sponsored telephony system.

5 In one aspect of the invention, a subscriber to an advertiser-sponsored telephony system is exposed to an advertisement message and may automatically request more information to purchase the product(s) which he or she hears advertised. Preferably, the subscriber has registered an e-mail
10 address with the advertiser-sponsored telephony system and, in response to the subscriber's request, an e-mail message is automatically sent to the subscriber's e-mail address.

In another aspect of the invention, an advertiser-sponsored telephony system provides a flexible method to track customer
15 fulfillment requests in response to product advertisements. A subscriber's request automatically generates an e-mail message to the subscriber's e-mail mailbox. Preferably, the e-mail message contains a hyperlink to an Internet web site through which the subscriber may obtain more information or order goods
20 or services. When the customer visits the linked Internet site, a record of this visit is made and the advertiser-sponsored telephony system is informed. The method allows the advertiser-sponsored telephony system to track subscriber responses to advertisement messages.

25 BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DRAWINGS

Figure 1 is a flowchart of a call process in an advertiser-sponsored telephony system according to one or more aspects of the present invention.

Figure 2 is a flowchart illustrating a preferred embodiment
30 of a method of automatically fulfilling customer requests in an advertiser-sponsored telephony system.

BEST MODES FOR CARRYING OUT INVENTION

Embodiments and other aspects of the invention described herein, including the system embodiments described below, may be made or used in conjunction with inventions described, in whole or in part, in co-pending U.S. Patent Application Serial No. 09/192,306, filed Nov. 16, 1998, entitled "INTERACTIVE VOICE RESPONSE AND CALL PROCESS APPLICATION FOR DELIVERING PROMOTIONAL MESSAGES VIA TELEPHONY SYSTEMS"; Provisional U.S. Application No. 60/114,572, filed December 31, 1998, entitled "METHOD OF ATTENTION BROKERAGE AND BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION"; U.S. Patent Application Serial No. 09/015,063, filed January 28, 1998, entitled "TELEPHONY SYSTEM FOR DELIVERING PROMOTIONAL MESSAGES"; and U.S. Patent Application Serial No. 09/245,409, filed Feb. 5, 1999, entitled "METHOD OF ATTENTION BROKERAGE AND BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION FOR AN ADVERTISER-SPONSORED TELEPHONY SYSTEM" each of which is commonly-assigned with the present invention and the entirety of each of which is hereby incorporated by reference for all purposes as if fully set forth herein.

Figure 1 shows a preferred embodiment of a call process 100 in an advertiser-sponsored telephony system which supports customer fulfillment according to the present invention.

In a first step 110, an individual subscribes to an advertiser-sponsored telephony service. The individual is assigned a unique subscriber ID and preferably a personal identification number (PIN) and one or more special dialing codes or access numbers for accessing the advertiser-sponsored telephony service.

Preferably, when the individual subscribes to the service, in a step 120 he or she designates an Internet e-mail address where he or she may receive e-mail messages. Alternatively, the advertiser-sponsored telephony service may provide free or subsidized e-mail accounts to its subscribers. In a step 130, the subscriber calls an access number for the advertiser-

sponsored telephony service. The system may be one such as that disclosed in co-pending U.S. Application Serial No. 09/015,063. In that case, the subscriber may enter a PIN number and receive a period of time, "X" minutes, for free or subsidized telephone communication, or other forms of compensation, in exchange for listening to one or more promotional messages.

In a step 140, the subscriber listens to an advertisement before being connected with a desired destination number for an earned period of free or subsidized calling.

10 Upon completion of the advertisement, in a step 150 the system presents the subscriber with an option to request additional information about the product which he or she just heard advertised. The additional information may supplement or expand upon the information contained in the advertisement, it may contain instructions on how to order the product, or it may simply be a confirmation of the advertisement details. In a preferred embodiment, the advertiser-sponsored telephony system plays a prerecorded message to the subscriber informing them of a keycode option for receiving an e-mail message. For example, 15 the prerecorded message may be similar to the following:

20 Please press '1' to receive an e-mail with more information about this product; press '*' to hear another message; or press '#' to place your call."

 In a step 150, the subscriber enters a keycode indicating either a desire to receive more information about the advertised product (or a confirming note about the advertised product), or declining more information.

25 If the subscriber requested more information or confirmation of the advertisement, then in a step 160, the advertiser-sponsored telephony system informs the subscriber that their request will be processed, and stores a fulfillment request which identifies the subscriber and the advertisement.

Then the process continues in a step 170 while the system processes the subscriber's request in a process 200.

Preferably, in each of the steps 150 and 170, the subscriber is given an option of hearing a next promotional message or placing a call. If the subscriber chooses to hear another promotional message, then the process goes to the step 140 and continues as before. If the subscriber chooses to place a call, then in a step 180, the subscriber is connected with the desired destination number for a period of free or subsidized calling.

Figure 2 shows a preferred embodiment of a process 200 for customer request fulfillment for an advertiser-sponsored telephony system.

The advertiser-sponsored telephony system may process a subscriber's product information request or order in real time. However, in the preferred embodiment described herein, the advertiser-sponsored telephony system first stores the subscriber's request in a memory device in a step 210 before processing it. This provides increased flexibility over real-time processing. Also, the advertiser-sponsored telephony system may not be able support the request in real-time because of some system failure. For example, the system may attempt to fulfill the request by delivering an e-mail message to the subscriber. However, it may not be able to deliver the message on the first attempt because an Internet connection may be down, for example, so storing the request allows the message to be sent later. In such a case, the message may be sent in a batch mode.

In one preferred embodiment, the system may attempt to fulfill the request by delivering an e-mail message to the subscriber in real-time, and also store the request. Subsequently, the system could then verify that all intended messages were correctly sent out. If some were missed for

whatever reason, then those can be re-sent, for example in a batch mode through a further administrative process.

Preferably, the advertiser-sponsored telephony system identifies each subscriber by a unique subscriber ID, and
5 identifies each advertisement message by a corresponding advertisement ID. Accordingly, in a preferred embodiment described herein, the advertiser-sponsored telephony system may store the subscriber's request by storing the subscriber's ID and the ID for the advertisement which triggered the
10 subscriber's request.

Subsequently, when the advertiser-sponsored telephony system is ready to process the request, in a step 220 it retrieves the subscriber request from the memory device wherein it is stored.

15 Next, in a step 230, the advertiser-sponsored telephony system retrieves from the memory device the e-mail message to be delivered, corresponding to the advertisement which triggered the subscriber's request. Preferably, a stored advertisement ID is retrieved which identifies the e-mail message.

20 In a preferred embodiment, the e-mail message contains a hyperlink to an Internet site offering more information about the advertised product and/or allowing a subscriber to order the product.

In one embodiment, the e-mail message may be individually
25 tailored to the corresponding advertisement which triggered the subscriber's request. Thus, for example, the message may itself contain further information about the advertised product.

Alternatively, the e-mail message may be a "boilerplate" message which is modified to contain the hyperlink to an
30 Internet site offering more information about the advertised product.

In a step 240, the advertiser-sponsored telephony system retrieves from the memory device the e-mail address for the

subscriber where the message is to be delivered. Preferably, a stored subscriber ID is retrieved which identifies the subscriber and his/her e-mail address.

5 In a step 250, the advertiser-sponsored telephony system sends the e-mail message to be subscriber's e-mail address. Preferably, the system also maintains a record of the request and the e-mail delivery. From this information, the advertiser may obtain feedback on the impact of its advertisements to motivate subscribers to take action. Additionally, the
10 advertiser-sponsored telephony system may implement a system of behavior modification which provides incentives or rewards when a subscriber requests information about and/or makes purchases of advertised products, for example as described in U.S. Patent Application Serial No. 09/245,409, filed Feb. 5, 1999, entitled
15 "METHOD OF ATTENTION BROKERAGE AND BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION FOR AN ADVERTISER-SPONSORED TELEPHONY SYSTEM." In that case, the record of the request and the e-mail delivery may be included in a measured subscriber behavior for determining an incentive or reward level for the subscriber.

20 In a step 260, at some later time the subscriber checks his or her e-mail in-box and finds the message which was sent by the advertiser-sponsored telephony system.

In a step 270, the subscriber opens and reads the e-mail message. As described above, in a preferred embodiment the
25 message includes a hyperlink to an Internet site offering more information about the advertised product. The e-mail message may include a "file attachment" in place of or in addition to the hyperlink. For example, the e-mail message may include a brochure on the advertised product in any convenient format,
30 (e.g., Adobe ACROBAT™ file) and/or a multimedia advertisement, such as a compressed video file (e.g., motion pictures expert group (MPEG) file; QUICKTIME™ file; etc.), and/or a promotional

code, electronic coupon, or a coupon which can be printed for subsequent presentation to a merchant directly, or by mail.

In a step 280, the subscriber decides to activate (e.g., click on) the hyperlink on his or her computer screen and in response thereto the computer opens an Internet browser program which connects him or her to the associated Internet site for the hyperlink. In a first preferred embodiment, in a step 290, the hyperlink directly connects the subscriber to an Internet site which is operated by or owned by the advertiser, and where there is more information about the advertised product and/or a further link for ordering the product. Alternatively, in a second preferred embodiment, the hyperlink connects the subscriber to an Internet site which is owned by or operated by the operator(s) of the advertiser-supported telephony system.

In either case, in a preferred embodiment, a site where the subscriber is linked to in the step 290 may optionally supply the subscriber with an electronic coupon for providing a discount for the advertiser's product(s). In that case, in a step 292 the subscriber may present the electronic coupon for redemption when purchasing the advertiser's product(s).

In a step 295, when the subscriber accesses the Internet site via the hyperlink, the advertiser-sponsored telephony system is notified that the subscriber has arrived. Or, when the subscriber clicks the link, a message is automatically triggered and sent to a designated recipient, such as an ad-sponsor operator or the advertiser itself. This may be done by a variety of means, including capturing a cookie from the subscriber's computer or by asking the subscriber to enter his or her subscriber ID code and/or PIN in order to receive credit for viewing the advertiser's information. Information that a subscriber has visited the hyperlink destination and/or purchased the advertiser's product may be used, for example, to track the effectiveness of a particular advertisement. The

information may also be used as a measured subscriber behavior for determining an incentive or reward level for the subscriber if the advertiser-sponsored telephony system implements a system of behavior modification which provides incentives or rewards
5 when a subscriber requests information about, and/or makes purchases of, advertised products.

While preferred embodiments are disclosed herein, many variations are possible which remain within the spirit and scope of the invention. Such variations would become clear to one of
10 ordinary skill in the art after inspection of the specification, drawings and claims herein. The invention therefore is not to be restricted except within the spirit and scope of the appended claims.

INDUSTRIAL APPLICABILITY

15 This invention is applicable to the field of advertiser-sponsored telephony systems, and more particularly to systems and methods of fulfilling a subscriber's request for additional information about, or to make a purchase of, a product advertised via an advertiser-sponsored telephony system.

CLAIMS

1. In an advertiser-sponsored telephony system, a method of fulfilling a telephony user's desire to receive more information regarding an advertised product, comprising:

5 (a) receiving a call from the telephony user to a service access number;

(b) prompting the telephony user to enter a destination telephone number;

10 (c) exposing the telephony user to at least one promotional message advertising said advertised product;

(d) receiving a request from said telephony user for additional information regarding said advertised product mentioned in said promotional message;

15 (e) compensating the telephony user for their exposure to the at least one promotional message with an earned time allotment for free or subsidized calling;

(f) initiating a connection between said telephony user and the destination number; and

20 (g) delivering an e-mail message to a designated e-mail mailbox for said subscriber.

2. The method of claim 1, further comprising storing in a memory device associated with said advertiser-sponsored telephony system an association between said user and said designated e-mail address.

25 3. The method of claim 1, wherein said e-mail message comprises additional information regarding said advertised product.

30 4. The method of claim 3, wherein said e-mail message further comprises a hyperlink to an Internet site containing further information regarding said advertised product.

5. The method of claim 1, wherein said e-mail message further comprises a video file containing information regarding said advertised product.

6. The method of claim 1, wherein said e-mail message
5 comprises a hyperlink to an Internet site containing further information regarding said advertised product.

7. The method of claim 6, wherein in response to said subscriber activating said hyperlink, a notification is sent to the advertiser-sponsored telephony system.

10 8. The method of claim 7, wherein said notification includes a subscriber ID.

9. The method of claim 6, wherein said e-mail message further comprises a video file comprising information regarding said advertised product.

15 10. In an advertiser-sponsored telephony system which provides free or subsidized calling for subscribed calling parties, a method of fulfilling a subscribed party's desire to receive more information regarding an advertised product, comprising:

20 storing e-mail addresses of respective subscribed calling parties; and

retrieving the e-mail address of a subscribed calling party, and transmitting information regarding an advertised product to thus retrieved e-mail address of the subscribed
25 calling party in response to a request from the subscribed calling party during an advertiser-sponsored telephone call.

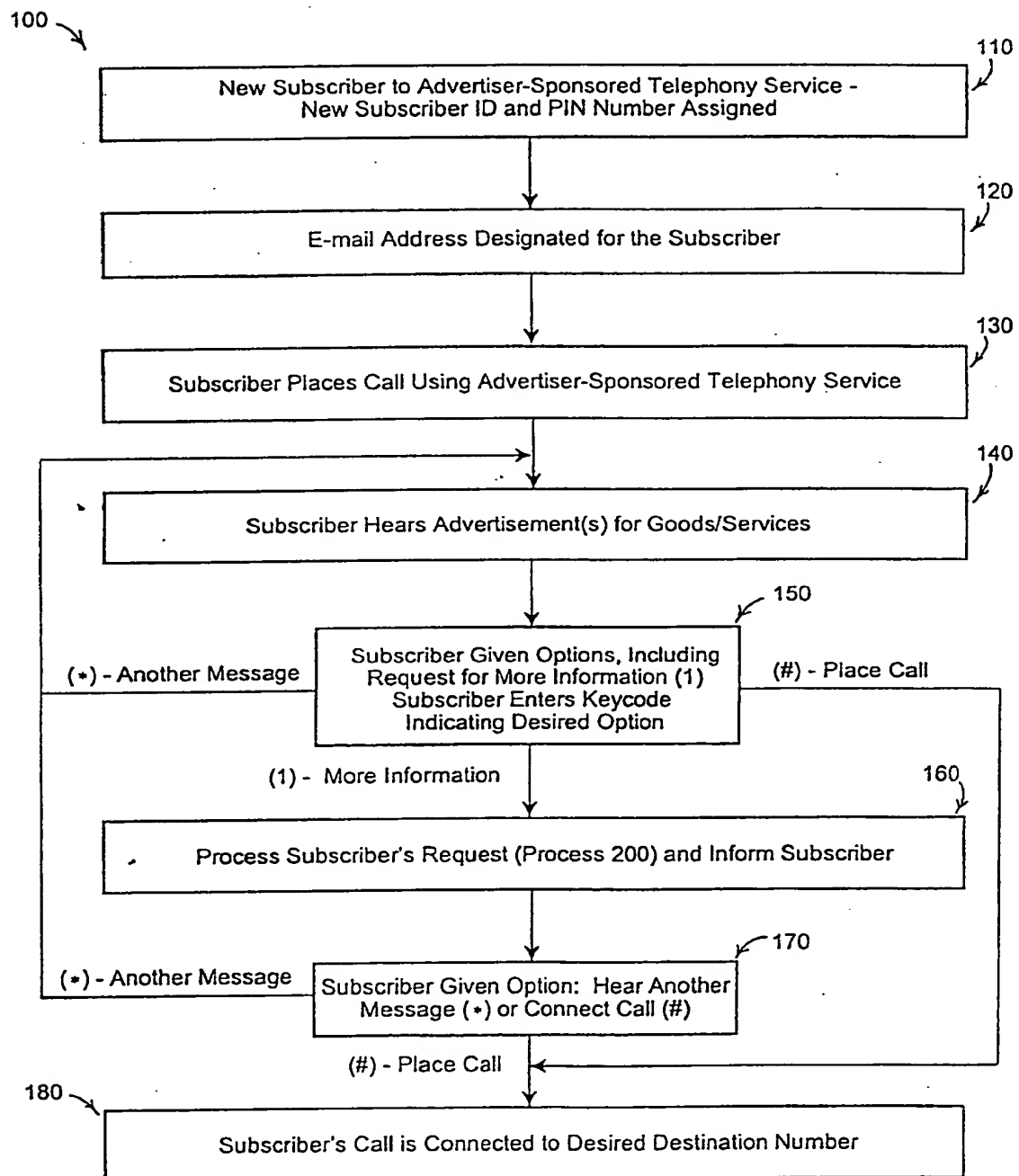


FIGURE 1

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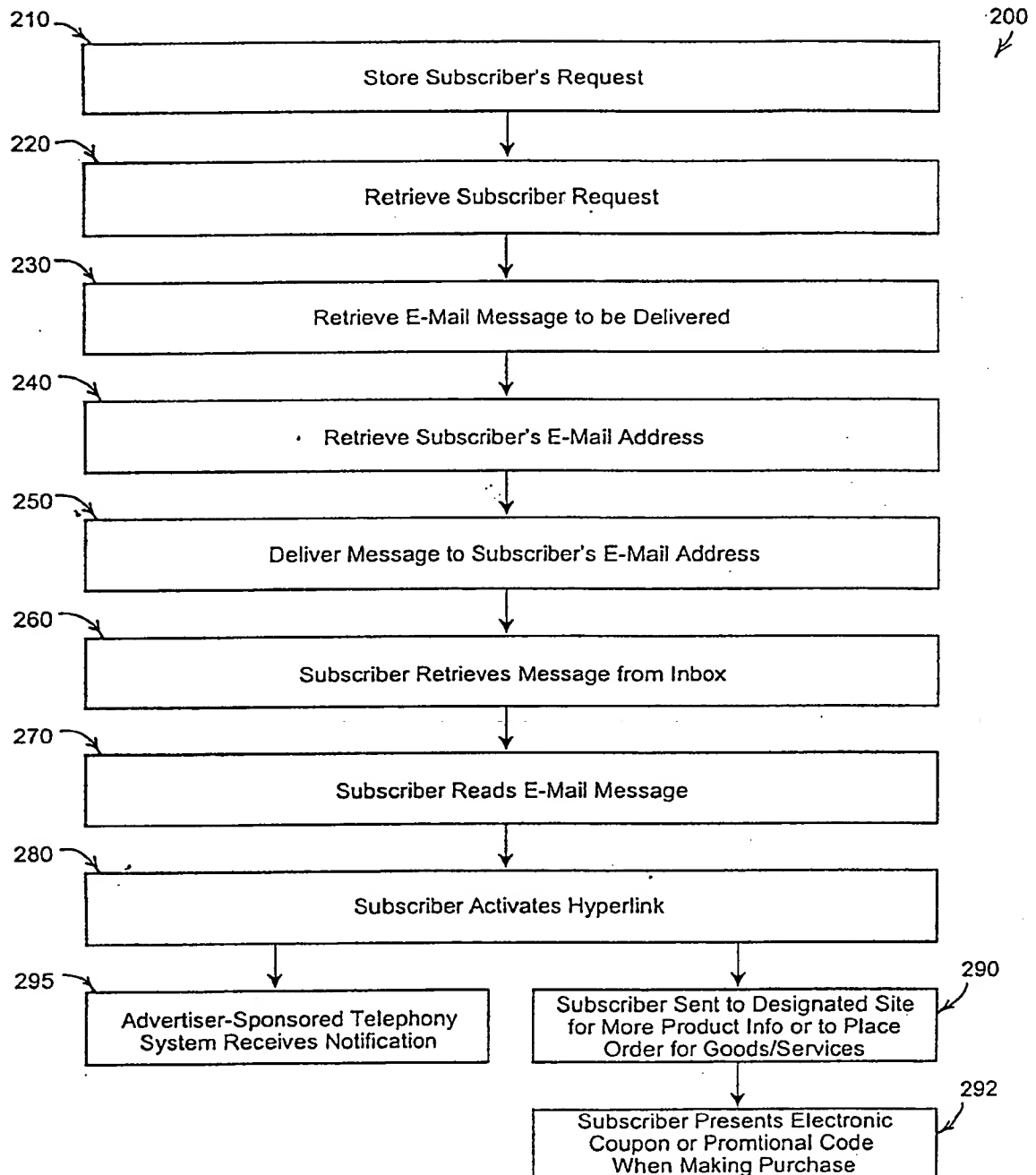


FIGURE 2

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

 International application No.
PCT/US00/04457

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

IPC(7) : H04M 11/00; H04M 1/64

US CL : 379/93.12

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B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

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Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
A	US 5,448,625 A (LEDERMAN) 05 September 1995, see entire patent.	1-10
A,P	US 5,880,770 A (ILCISIN et al) 09 March 1999, see entire patent.	1-10
A,P	US 6,009,150 A (KAMEL) 28 December 1999, see entire patent.	1-10



Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.



See patent family annex.

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Date of the actual completion of the international search

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James R. Matthews

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.
PCT/US00/04457

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched

Classification System: U.S.

379/93.01, 93.05, 93.09, 93.12, 93.17, 93.23-93.28, 93.31, 93.37, 90.01, 110.01, 201, 114, 142, 112, 115, 207, 202, 257, 88.117, 88.19, 88.22-88.25, 67.1;
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